

Anderson: Are there any wetbacks, any more?

Santana: No, hardly any. Not in agriculture. There are some working in restaurants and hotels, maybe. I remember the time they had a meeting of big government people at the Hotel _____ right down here, on the subject "What can we do about the wetback evil?" There were 11 wetbacks working in that hotel at that very time, serving these guys their meals, washing their dishes. (Laughter.)

Anderson: There were so many wetbacks at one time, not very long ago. Now hardly any. I wonder how they were able to clean them out so fast?

Santana: Oh, it wasn't hard. They're very fond of wine, so they would catch them walking down the road on their way to the bar. Or, they'd catch them in the fields.

Anderson: How did they tell who was illegal and who was a Mexican-American?

Santana: The citizens had to have a card.

Anderson: And if they lost it, say?

Wetbacks

Santana: I remember one time I was on a ranch when the Inspector came around. There was one kid, he couldn't have been more than ~~17~~ 15 or so. He was very dark, and he was having a tough time. He would say, "I born here. I born here, meester." And the guy said, "You go to school?" "Sure," he says. So the inspector says, "Oh, yeah? Prove it. Spell cinnamon." Now, how do you like that? I couldn't spell cinnamon. Many guys, they've been to college, they have Bachelor's and Master's degrees, they couldn't spell cinnamon. But here this poor kid had to spell cinnamon. (Laughter)

Anderson: What happened to the kid?

Santana: Oh, I don't know. Maybe he talked them into it after a while. Another time I was out when the immigration people came around, and they were catching the wetbacks by the dozen on this one farm. There was one old guy working on a pear sorter near the house. Everybody was running every which way, but he just stood there and kept on working, and kept his mouth shut. Nobody said anything to him.

Anderson: I imagine the growers weren't any too happy when their workers were rounded up.

Santana: Some of them got pretty irritated. They used to fill up the ditches around the orchards with water before they'd pull a raid.

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Then they'd drive in in these jeeps and tear aound. My brother's wife told me about one time she was standing on the porch of her place, and saw a couple of Mexicans running through the orchard for all they were worth. She never saw anybody run so fast. Just like a couple of deer. Then a few minutes later, these inspectors came tearing through in their jeeps. They used to knock branches down and everything. And they would act arrogant. No, the growers weren't any too happy. Wetbacks were the best workers they ever had.

Anderson: Well, now, some of these growers are pretty influential. Why do you suppose they weren't ~~xxxx~~ able to make their voices heard?

Santana: Always before all they had to do was pick up a telephone and talk to their congressman or senator. But, you know, I think the reason they weren't able to stop this drive was because of the Communist hysteria. People were talking about how many Communists were sneaking across the border to pick fruit (laughter), and this was the end. The growers couldn't put themselves in the position of defending Communism.

Anderson: I have been told by some people that the braceros are actually the same people who used to be wetbacks, only under a different name.